

FACT SHEET

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ♦ Office of Multifamily Housing Programs

Delivering Technology Access to America's Communities

Local Businesses Strengthen Neighborhood Networks Centers

Successful Neighborhood Networks centers form various alliances and partnerships to underwrite programs, services, and other expenses. Developing and growing support from area businesses is critical for starting and sustaining Neighborhood Networks centers. Local companies can provide a significant donor base for both funding and in-kind contributions.

Local businesspeople understand the value of investing in their community—to enhance their company's image, to generate a larger customer base, and to build more economically viable communities.

Researching Prospective Partners

Almost any community business may partner with Neighborhood Networks centers. It is a good idea for Neighborhood Networks centers to research each company's portfolio of services and products and its charitable history before meeting with a company to discuss partnerships. Franchises and family businesses tend to be locally owned and operated. In contrast to nationwide chain operators, local owners are more familiar with the surrounding communities.

Keep in mind this rule of thumb in fund development: Most people and entities do not make donations because they are never asked. Do not rule out approaching any particular group of businesses based solely on whether they are locally or nationally owned and operated.

Types of Business Support

Local businesses can support Neighborhood Networks centers in a variety of ways. They can provide two basic types of support:

- ♦ Cash support.
- ♦ Noncash or in-kind support, such as materials, equipment, and volunteers.

Many local businesses plan and budget for community activities and encourage their workforce to volunteer with community organizations. As a result, community organizations, such as Neighborhood Networks centers, can receive hundreds of hours of no-cost volunteer support to augment programs and operations.

Many local businesses may prefer to donate services, materials, and equipment, including furnishings, a new paint job for a classroom, or used computers.

Neighborhood Networks centers may increase partnerships by following two simple rules. First, the time spent in educating the business community about the benefits of Neighborhood Networks programs, as an investment in the community, can be time well spent in building committed partners. Second, Neighborhood Networks centers with 501(c)(3) status can offer donors an extra incentive—tax deductions and exemptions for both cash and in-kind donations. Call the Neighborhood Networks Information Line at (888) 312-2743 for information about obtaining 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service.



Neighborhood Networks
Information Center

(888) 312-2743

TTY: (800) 483-2209

NeighborhoodNetworks@hud.gov

About Neighborhood Networks

Neighborhood Networks' mission is to improve computer access, advance literacy, and create employment opportunities for residents of HUD insured and assisted housing.

Neighborhood Networks encourages resident involvement in the planning and development of self-sustaining centers.

Residents gain access to onsite programs and services that provide job skills, education, and supportive services that foster healthier, more self-sufficient families.

More than 1,200 Neighborhood Networks centers are located at HUD Multifamily Housing properties throughout all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.



How to Approach Local Businesses

Recognizing the many ways that local businesses can support Neighborhood Networks centers is the first step in preparing to build a relationship with these companies. Before approaching a business for support, follow these steps to plan and implement a strategy for prospective donors.

- ◆ **Develop an information statement about your Neighborhood Networks center.**

State who it serves, how it serves residents, and its general goals. Include this statement in a brochure or flier so that you have something to leave behind with each prospective donor.

- ◆ **Examine and prioritize needs.** Review your Neighborhood Networks programs and make lists of the materials, equipment, and financial needs. Then prioritize the needs list. Donors generally want to respond to the most urgent needs. A prioritized list will also help you to determine your target market.

- ◆ **Conduct research.** Research potential business partners and learn about their products, services, operations, and ownership. Canvass staff, board members, friends, and other key contacts for the names of local business owners. An introduction from a third party can often help with meeting new potential partners. Do not forget to ask Neighborhood Networks center vendors for their support.

- ◆ **Network.** Join a membership organization of community nonprofits. Ask about the partnerships that others have formed. Join the local chamber of commerce and become involved in a working group. Go to business mixers and exchange business cards.

- ◆ **Be patient.** Recognize that building relationships takes time. Because business owners are frequently targeted for solicitations, they may be offended by requests for cash donations too early in the relationship. Neighborhood Networks centers need to invest time in nurturing what should be a mutually satisfying relationship with a business owner. Start off by asking for some needs on your list that could be met through in-kind donations.

Sources of information

To improve the quality and number of businesses in the center's donor base, try the following strategies.

- ◆ **Contact local chambers of commerce listed in the telephone directory or online.** Look for more than one listing because several chambers may serve the same area. For example, Hispanic and Asian chambers of commerce frequently exist alongside similar organizations. Obtain a directory of members. In these directories, business members are frequently listed according to the service or product provided. Additionally, ask each chamber for a schedule of events. Equally important, join the nonprofit working group and attend mixers and other events.

- ◆ **Contact local associations of nonprofits with interests similar to the center.** Training, employment, housing, technology, senior citizen, and other interest groups may have associations in your locale. Neighborhood Networks centers will benefit from joining these associations and learning more about other organizations and how they work with the local business community.

- ◆ **Use the Internet.** Many search tools are available to help find local businesses that centers can approach. For example, www.google.com is a useful search engine. At the search prompt, enter city, state, and other information specific to the search target. If too many listings are presented, add words to the prompt until the list is manageable.

For more information, contact:

U.S. Department of Housing and
Urban Development

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